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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-6035

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS

April 2, 2004

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ROBERT S. RANGEL, STAFF DIRECTOR

The Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I would like to first extend my sympathy and dismay over the recent brutal killings in Fallujah. All of the killings in Iraq—both of our troops and of contractors and civilians—have been unacceptable and tragic, but the murder and desecration of the four Americans working for Blackwater USA was particularly barbaric. I would hope that plans are being prepared for a measured but powerful response.

One of the issues raised by this tragedy is the role being played by private military firms such as Blackwater. Media reports indicate that at the time of the ambush, the personnel in question were providing security for a food delivery convoy. I also understand that Blackwater provides the personal security for Ambassador Paul Bremer.

I would like to request that you provide my office with a breakdown of information regarding private military and security personnel in Iraq. Specifically I would like to know which firms are operating in Iraq, how many personnel each firm has there, which specific functions they are performing, how much they are being paid, and from which appropriations accounts. Additionally, I would like to understand what the chain of command is for these personnel, what rules of engagement govern them, and how disciplinary or criminal accusations are handled if any such claims are levied against them.

Firms like Blackwater are clearly serving important functions in Iraq and putting themselves at risk. It is important that Congress have a clearer sense of the roles they are playing so that we can conduct effective oversight. I appreciate your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,



Ike Skelton
Ranking Democrat